

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NAPLES 00689 051818Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAPLES 689

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SUBJECT: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN POLICY TOWARDS ITALY

REF:ROME REFTEL 587

1. SUMMARY: THERE ARE 25 MILLION AMERICANS OF ITALIAN ORIGIN IN THE U.S. SINCE THE MAJORITY OF THESE HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN SOUTHERN ITALY, ONE MIGHT ASSUME THAT THE NEW AMERICAN POLICIES WOULD PENETRATE FASTER IN THIS REGION THAN ELSEWHERE IN ITALY. UNFORTUNATELY, I FIND THAT THE TIES ARE MUCH WEAKER HERE THAN THEY ARE ON THE PART OF THE PEOPLE AND GOVT. OF THE UNITED STATES. CONSEQUENTLY, AS IS USUALLY THE CASE WITH NEW FASHIONS AND VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING ELSE, PRESIDENT CARTER'S POLICIES HAVE TAKEN SOME TIME TO FILTER THROUGH AND BE UNDERSTOOD. IT IS ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT SOUTHERNITALIANS WHO HAVE

PAGE 02 RUFRSGG0215 C O N F I D E N T I A L NAPLES 689

FORMED OPINIONS HAVE ACQUIRED

THEM MAINLY FROM THEIR TELEVISION STATION OR NEWSPAPER, AND SO BASICALLY FROM THEIR POLITICAL PARTY. IN THE CASE OF POLITICAL LEADERS AND OTHERS WITH AN AWARENESS OF POLITICS--THE OPINION MAKERS--THE AMERICAN POLICY SEEMS TO BE UNDERSTOOD WITH REASONABLE ACCURACY. THERE IS CERTAINLY AN UNDERSTANDING THAT NO ABOUT-FACE IN OUR ITALIAN POLICY IS IN THE OFFING. END SUMMARY.

2. IT HAS TAKEN SOME TIME BUT THE MAJORITY OF THE ITALIAN PUBLIC NOW
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 NAPLES 00689 051818Z

DOES HAVE SOME MORE OR LESS WELL FORMED OPINION REGARDING AMERICAN POLICIES TOWARD THE COUNTRY. IN THE MAIN, THEY ARE FORMED BY THE NEWSPAPERS HABITUALLY READ, PARTY AFFILIATION, TELEVISION AND THE VIEWS OF LIKE-MINDED FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS. SINCE THESE PERCEPTIONS OF OUR POLICIES RELATE SO DIRECTLY TO POLITICAL SYMPATHIES, IT MAY BE BEST TO PREPARE A SORT OF A MASS CATALOG OF POLICY VIEWS BASED ON PARTIES:

A). CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (DC) - SINCE THE PARTY COVERS SUCH A BROAD RANGE OF POLITICAL TASTES; REALLY MORE A COLECTION OF PARTIES THAN A PARTY; IT IS DIFFICULT TO GENERALIZE ABOUT IT. BUT, ON THE WHOLE, CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THEY STILL DO HAVE OUR SUPPORT, THAT WE WANT THEM TO WIN AND THAT WE ARE AGAINST COMMUNISTS

PAGE 03 RUFRSGG0215 C O N F I D E N T I A L NAPLES 689

BECOMING MEMBERS OF THE CABINET. THE CERTAINTY ABOUT THIS LAST POINT WENT THROUGH A DIFFICULT PERIOD AFTER OUR RECENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WHEN IT WAS NOT YET CLEAR WHAT THE POLICIES OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE, BUT STATEMENTS OF OUR POLICY BOTH BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE AND MORE RECENTLY BY THE DEPARTMENT AND AMBASSADOR GARDNER HAVE VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED THIS UNEASE.

B). ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) - THIS IS AN INTERESTING EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL RULE THAT VIEWS OF OUR POLICY REFLECT THE LINE OF THE NEWSPAPER OF THE PARTY IN QUESTION. IN SPITE OF THE INSISTENCE OF COMMUNIST DOMINATED NEWSPAPERS THAT THE U.S. REALLY WOULD NOT MIND IF THE PCI CAME INTO THE GOVERNMENT, THERE IS PROBABLY NO GROUP IN ITALY MORE CONVINCED OF THE HOSTILITY OF THE AMERICANS THAN THE COMMUNISTS AND THEIR SYMPATHIZERS. IN OUR OPINION THIS GROUP PROBABLY BELIEVES THAT OUR POLICY HAS CHANGED LESS THAN IT HAS AND WILL NOT BE IMPRESSED IN ANY MASS OPINION ASPECT BY, FOR INSTANCE A SOFTENING IN OUR VISA POLICIES REGARDING COMMUNISTS.

C). SOCIALIST PARTY (PSI) - PROBABLY THE MOST UNSTABLE OF ANY ITALIAN POLITICAL PERSUASION AS REGARDS OUR POLICY TOWARD ITALY. A FEW MONTHS AGO MEMBERS AND SYMPATHIZERS WIDELY HELD THE OPINION CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 NAPLES 00689 051818Z

PAGE 04 RUFRSGG0215 C O N F I D E N T I A L NAPLES 689

THAT THE U.S. WAS ABOUT TO DISMANTLE ITS LONGSTANDING OBJECTION TO COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. THEY ARE MUCH LESS SURE NOW. THE PARTY IS SCHIZOPHRENIC IN ITS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE U.S. - ALTERNATELY (OR SIMULTANEOUSLY) ADMIRING AND HATING. SEEMINGLY

,
THE BASE IS PREPARED TO BELIEVE ALMOST ANYTHING ABOUT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY HERE. INsofar AS OUR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CAN BE FINE-TUNED TO THAT DEGREE, WE \$UGHT, IN OUR OPINION, TAKE FURTHER ACTION TO RE-ASSURE THIS PARTICULAR AREA OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM OF FIRMNESS OF OUR INTENTIONS.

D). FASCISTS (MSI) - FOR PRESENT PURPOSES WE CAN INCLUDE THE SCHISMATIC DEMOCRAZIA NAZIONALE (DN) HERE EVEN IF THEY ARE NOW "DEMOCRATS". THE EXTREME RIGHT FEELS BETRAYED BY AMERICAN POLICY. LOOSENED VISA RESTRICTIONS FOR COMMUNISTS, FOR EXAMPLE, WILL BE USED TO PROVE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN RIGHT ALL ALONG. ONLY THE MOST

EXTREME KIND OF PUBLIC ACTION ON OUR PART WOULD HAVE MUCH EFFECT
HERE.

E). THE OTHER LAY PARTIES (PRI, PSDI, PLI) - THESE PARTIES WILL
BE TREATED TOGETHER BECAUSE, EVEN IF THE POLITICAL LINE DIFFERS,
THEY HAVE A GOOD DEAL IN COMMON IN THE SENSE THAT, BEING VERY SMALL,
ALL THREE HAVE CERTAIN "ELITE" CHARACTERISTICS IN THEIR MEMBERSHIP.

PAGE 05 RUFRSGG0215 C O N F I D E N T I A L NAPLES 689

FOR ONE THE MEMBERSHIP AND SYMPATHIZERS ARE BETTER INFORMED AND MORE
LIKELY TO BE AWARE OF THE SIGNALS WE ARE TRYING TO SEND. INTERPRETA-
TION OF THESE SIGNALS MAY VARY SOMEWHAT, BUT IT IS OUR IMPRESSION
THAT ALL THREE GROUPS HAVE A FAIR UNDERSTANDING THAT THE CARTER
ADMINISTRATION STANCE AT HOME AND ABROAD IS BASED ON MORALITY AND
REASON AND THAT MODERATION WILL PREVAIL. IT SHOULD BE NOTED,
HOWEVER, THAT THE PSDI IS GOING THROUGH DRASTIC CHANGES WHICH MAKE
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PAGE 04 NAPLES 00689 051818Z

SWEEPING JUDGMENTS QUESTIONABLE.

F) OPINION LEADERS - JOURNALISTS, POLITICIANS, BUSINESSMEN, ETC.
THERE IS A GREAT DIVERSITY IN THE PERCEPTION OF OUR POLICY AMONG
THIS GROUP. THEY ARE MORE SOPHISTICATED, THEY SEE OUR SIGNALS BUT
THEY ARE GENERALLY A SKEPTICAL LOT. TO THESE PEOPLE IT SEEMS VERY
MUCH LIKE THE LATEST ENUNCIATION OF OUR POLICY MAY NOT REPRESENT
A FINAL STATEMENT. THEY ARE QUITE AWARE THAT THE TRANSITION IN
WASHINGTON IS STILL GOING ON AND POLICIES ARE BEING ATTENUATED--AND
THIS WILL CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME. PRESIDENT CARTER IS PERCEIVED TO
BE CLEARLY IN CHARGE, BUT THE QUESTION OF WHO ELSE IS IMPORTANT IN
THE NEW WASHINGTON, AS WELL AS COROLLARY EFFECTS ON OUR POLICY, ARE
ALSO SUBJECTS OF CONTINUING DISCUSSION. COLANTONIO.

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